

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH AND  
SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

April 13, 2010

**INCREASING CHILD PROTECTION ACCOUNTABILITY BY LAW ENFORCEMENT  
AND DCFS**

Child abuse is a horrendous crime. Combating child abuse requires a united front by various agencies, primarily the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Law Enforcement, both legally-mandated to protect children from harm. Information-sharing is only one part of the solution. Following the sharing of information, each recipient agency's accountability in responding to and investigating allegations of child abuse is key.

DCFS annually receives approximately 200,000 reports of suspected child abuse from both concerned individuals (relatives, neighbors and anonymous individuals) as well as from mandated reporters. California Penal Code § 11166(j) requires DCFS to cross-report to both law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office all allegations of suspected child abuse other than reports of general neglect. The cross-reporting laws were enacted to ensure, in every possible case of child abuse, that each affected agency performs its unique mandated responsibility, including but not limited to reviewing, responding to and investigating the allegations; and auditing statutory compliance, all in an effort to protect the child victim.

In accordance with Penal Code § 11166(j), DCFS annually reports 100,000 allegations to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. In April 2009, in order to improve law enforcement's statutory compliance through rapid, secure electronic receipt and transmission of child abuse reports, the Los Angeles County District Attorney implemented the Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System (E-SCARS) with DCFS and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD). By October 2009, E-SCARS was expanded to every independent law enforcement agency in Los Angeles County. In November 2009, in order to hold more abusers accountable and to further enforce local law enforcement agency responses to child abuse reports, this Board unanimously directed cross-reporting expansion to those City Attorney's and City Prosecutor's Offices throughout Los Angeles County that prosecute misdemeanor child abuse cases.

**MOTION**

RIDLEY-THOMAS \_\_\_\_\_

YAROSLAVSKY \_\_\_\_\_

KNABE \_\_\_\_\_

ANTONOVICH \_\_\_\_\_

MOLINA \_\_\_\_\_

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Electronic information-sharing is being accomplished at a high level through E-SCARS as a front-end notification tool; and the Family and Child Index (FCI), as an investigative tool. As of January 2010, 21,000 E-SCARS cross-reports have been submitted to the specific law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the alleged child abuse case, thus enabling a virtually immediate response ***IF*** the law enforcement agency chooses to so prioritize one. LASD, which receives 15,000 E-SCARS annually, has chosen to prioritize at-risk children by responding to each and every E-SCAR it receives as a "call for service." This has resulted in the investigation of nearly 5,000 cases of child physical abuse, sexual molestation and rape by 45 forensically-trained Sheriff's Special Victims Bureau Investigators annually. Furthermore, monthly FCI utilization by participating County agencies has surged from ***14*** queries in January 2003 to ***over 23,000*** queries in March 2010. Assembly Bill 2322, (Feuer), State legislation introduced to further enhance the quality of information shared through FCI, is scheduled for consideration in the California legislature on April 27, 2010.

What remains is a need to tighten the safety net around the children of Los Angeles County by heightening accountability and collaboration between DCFS and law enforcement agencies countywide. Upon its receipt of an E-SCAR, law enforcement is equally responsible and as important as DCFS in the mission of protecting children from abuse. In order to determine how best to accomplish this, we must strive to standardize E-SCARS utilization, responses and protocols for child abuse investigations countywide.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors request:

1. The Sheriff to report back in 45 days describing its utilization of E-SCARS and its protocol for all child abuse investigations; and,
2. The District Attorney to report back in 45 days describing the utilization of E-SCARS by all remaining local law enforcement agencies countywide.

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